

Administration of Barack Obama, 2011

Remarks at an Independence Day Celebration

July 4, 2011

The President. Hello, everybody! Happy Fourth of July! On behalf of the entire Obama family, we want to welcome you here to the White House.

Right now, in small towns and big cities all across America, folks are getting together in their backyards; they're raising flags, firing up grills, and enjoying time with family and with friends. It's a tradition that we try to follow here at the White House, although I've got to say we've got a few more people here than most. And I cannot think of anybody I would rather celebrate with than all of you, the men and women of our military and our extraordinary military families.

So let me just check to see who we've got here. I understand we've got some Army here. How about Navy? Air Force! Marines! And we've got some Coast Guard.

After all that you do for our country every day, we wanted to give you guys a chance to get out of the uniform, relax a little bit, and have some fun.

But of course, it's also a time for us to reflect on the meaning of America. In many ways, I think that that small band of patriots who signed their names to the Declaration of Independence and risked their lives for freedom might be surprised to see their legacy all these years later: a nation that's led revolutions in commerce, that sent a man to the Moon, that lifted up the poor, that cured the sick, a nation that fought for democracy and served as a beacon of hope around the world.

But all this could only happen because of our Founders' central faith that through democracy and individual rights, ordinary people have it within their means to forge a nation that's more just and more equal and more free. And all of you are heirs to that legacy. You represent the latest in a long line of heroes who have served our country with honor and who've made incredible sacrifices to protect the freedoms that we all enjoy.

And I've got some of those heroes here with us today, like Army Sergeant First Class Justin Gang. Where's Justin? Right here. While on patrol in Iraq, his convoy was struck by an IED and fell under enemy fire. Even after being wounded by shrapnel himself, he helped to secure the scene and evacuate his wounded comrades to safety. And today we honor his extraordinary courage.

Navy Hospitalman First Class Obi Nwagwu, born in Nigeria, he became an American citizen and volunteered to serve in our Nation's military. And as an orthopedic technician, he helps our wounded warriors regain their strength and resume their lives back home. And today we honor his incredible dedication, Obi.

Air Force Master Sergeant Heather Adkins.

Audience member. Whoo!

The President. Is that Heather's husband up there?

M. Sgt. Heather Adkins, USAF. No, Heather doesn't have a husband.

The First Lady. [Inaudible]

The President. I'm not trying to get anybody in trouble here. [Laughter] Whether it's partnering with Iraqi Army or making sure our troops have shelter in some of the toughest places on the planet, she knows how to get things done. And today we honor her tireless devotion.

Marine Corps Staff Sergeant Keith Kesterson, he rushed through enemy fire to free a fellow marine trapped inside a burning vehicle. And after untangling the marine's equipment, he extinguished the flames and pulled him to safety. And today we honor his unyielding loyalty.

Coast Guard Chief Petty Officer Marlene Riklon—where's Marlene? Right over here. Come on over here. Less than 24 hours after the devastating earthquake in Haiti she was on the scene helping direct aid and save lives in the midst of chaos. And today we honor her incredible dedication.

These American patriots, all the services that are represented up here today, all of you who are out there today, you're the reason why America and our Armed Forces remain the greatest force for peace and security that the world has ever known. And together, you're standing with all of those around the world who are reaching for the same freedoms and the same liberties that we celebrate today.

So I just want to close by saying thank you. You've done everything we could have asked of you. Your families have served alongside of you with strength and devotion. America is proud of all of you. And as long as I have the privilege of serving as your Commander in Chief, I'm going to make sure that you have the support that you need in the field; I'm going to make sure that you get the care you deserve when you come home. And with the help of Michelle and Dr. Jill Biden, we will make sure America takes care of your families and recognizes the extraordinary sacrifices that they are making.

This day is possible because of your service. And so I think it's only appropriate that we give you a chance to celebrate it together as well.

God bless you. God bless the United States of America. And happy Fourth of July, everybody. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 6:30 p.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Sgt. Brent A. Larimer, USMC, 1st Battalion, 2d Marine Regiment, Alpha Company; and Jill Biden, wife of Vice President Joe Biden.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Independence Day celebration.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Adkins, Heather; Biden, Jill; Gang, Justin; Kesterson, Robert K.; Larimer, Brent A.; Nwagwu, Obi; Obama, Malia; Obama, Michelle; Obama, Natasha "Sasha"; Riklon, Marlene.

Subjects: Armed Forces, U.S. : Military families; Armed Forces, U.S. : Military family benefits, expansion of; Armed Forces, U.S. : Military technologies, development and funding; Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Casualties; Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Service and dedication; Haiti : Earthquake, damage and recovery efforts; Holidays and special observances : Independence Day; Iraq : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; Veterans : Access to health and medical care.

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